
Brief Report

Gender Differences in Rape Reporting¹

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This paper compares male and female rape reporting behavior. Participants from National Crime and Victimization Survey data (90% female, 10% male) are much like victims of other violent crimes (25% non-white, higher than average unemployment, young, and unmarried). The data indicate that the situational characteristics of rape, and factors that influence a rape reporting decision, differ by sex. Whereas men fail to report rape when it jeopardizes their masculine self-identity, women fail to report rape when the rape does not fit the classic stereotypical rape situation. Women reported victimization more frequently than did men. It is asserted that further comparative research on rape reporting behavior utilizing qualitative methods is needed in order to fully understand rape victimization for both sexes.

Few crimes have more serious consequences than those surrounding forcible rape. Much rape research has been directed toward correcting a mythology generated by the lurid combination of sex, violence, and crime drama. But, however much we have learned about rape in general, one topic has resisted illumination—male rape. The rape of men in the community has received little empirical attention primarily because relevant data about this statistically rare crime are scarce. Nevertheless, it is our intention here

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to help correct this disparity by addressing the topic of rape reporting. Most studies have not considered reporting practices separately for women and men (Gartner and McMillan, 1995). Rather than testing theory, our objective is to demonstrate the need for more research on the rape of males in the community in order to strengthen rape theory, as well as our knowledge of rape in general for both men and women.

WHY IS RAPE NOT REPORTED?

Rape is regarded everywhere as a serious, violent crime, but it is vastly under-reported in all jurisdictions. The underreporting of this crime is the result of a number of reasons that are related to the ways in which rape is perceived and defined. These perceptions take the form of specific conceptions of rape, as well as the general process of sex role socialization that aids our identifying particular acts as rape.

The abundant literature on rape reporting has understandably concentrated on female victims. That literature indicates that there are numerous factors that might inhibit a woman's decision to report rape. These include that rape is an emotionally upsetting and deeply humiliating experience for the victim (Feldman-Summers and Palmer, 1980), there is still a strong negative stigma for rape victims, even within their own families (Feldman-Summers and Palmer, 1980), victims are sometimes seen as having consented to the act either by not resisting sufficiently or by "leading on" the assailant (Williams, 1984), a woman's judgment about the "costs and benefits" of legal intervention might be shaped by her perceptions of institutional reactions to violence against women (Gartner and McMillan, 1995, p. 398), and it is well known that some rape victims have in the past been subject to humiliation in the form of embarrassing questioning by the police and prosecutors to verify that a crime has occurred, and the handling of rape victims in the courtroom has sometimes been unethical with questioning in a public forum about the victim's previous sexual history, the provocative circumstances relating to the rape, and the extent to which the victim employed physical resistance (Spohn and Horney, 1992).

Women need to see themselves as victims of rape in order to report it. Women are more likely to see themselves as victims if they were subjected to a high level of violence and bodily injuries (Amir, 1971). Research has also shown that female victims are less likely to report victimization if the rapist is a relative or acquaintance (Gartner and McMillan, 1995; Amir, 1971; Williams, 1984). A victim's income and educational status can affect reporting to the police (Liziotte, 1985; Skogan, 1984), as well as the theft of property and the use of a weapon during a rape (Gartner and McMillan, 1995).

We might expect that the reasons for male victim rape reporting would parallel those for women, but we should acknowledge the possibility that different forces may operate with males. Male rape is one of the least discussed crimes in our society (Groth and Burgess, 1980), perhaps because it is commonly seen as an aberration related to the artificiality of prison life or perhaps to some violent aspect of a homosexual subculture (Kaufman et al., 1980). In addition, male victims may experience being raped as even more humiliating than female victims. As with female victims (Adler, 1992; Groth and Burgess, 1980), the emotional trauma experienced by raped males can generate confusion and inhibit reporting. A majority of males attempt to control their emotional reactions, reflecting a gender role expectation that it is unmanly for men to express emotion, even when the man is under a great deal of physical or emotional distress (Kaufman et al., 1980). Because reports of male rape are statistically rare male victims experience the additional trauma of making it difficult to identify with other male victims. Research has also shown that males are more likely to be victims of multiple assailants, to sustain more physical trauma, and to be held captive longer than female victims (Kaufman et al., 1980). Such feelings virtually guarantee low rape reporting rates. Reporting a rape to the police is at least as stressful for men as women (Groth and Burgess, 1980), but the extent to which victims subscribe to a male ethic of self reliance, reporting may be further depressed. As in nonsexual areas of their lives, men are generally expected to defend themselves against threats (Finklehor, 1984, p. 156–157). Along with this idea is the implicit belief that rape is synonymous with the loss of masculinity (Groth and Burgess, 1980; Adler, 1992). For these reasons, there may be substantial risk to the male rape victim's self-concept in reporting this crime.

For these reasons, the asymmetrical effects of gender on the experience and meaning of rape and rape reporting are contextual, and we expect that male and female reporting behavior is different both in effect and antecedent (i.e., the factors that influence male reporting are different from those that influence female reporting). We hypothesize that male victims will report rape less frequently than female victims, and that men are more likely to report rape when it is physically or emotionally unavoidable, i.e., when it is too serious to ignore. Women, on the other hand, will be more likely to report rape not only when it is too serious to ignore (bodily injuries), but also when other social factors are present, such as victim background, the victim/offender relationship, and whether or not another crime occurred during the criminal event (in this case, something being stolen and the use of a weapon) to help demonstrate the seriousness of the crime. In other words, men experience and give meaning to rape and reporting rape as threatening to their self concept and masculinity, whereas

rape and rape reporting do not contradict but rather reinforce a hetero-normative feminine self-concept for women.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Data

The data used in this study are from the National Crime and Victimization Survey (NCVS) National Sample Rape Subset for the years 1979-1987.³ These data are particularly attractive for the purposes at hand because "the NCVS is a better approximation of the true rate of rape over time than the UCR rate" (Jensen and Kapros 1993, p. 382), victim surveys are one of the best data sources available to study actual crime in the community, and victim surveys are also able to identify non-reporters and the reasons for not reporting to the police.

The rape subset of the NCVS provided information from 897 rape victims, 81 of whom were men. Descriptive statistics (see Table I) show that both male and female rape victims are similar to one another in terms of social background (e.g., race, age, education, and income). Most of the victims in the sample are white, young, and unmarried. Male rape victims are more likely than women to be employed and married at the time of the incident, but the racial composition of men and women are roughly the same. Rape appears to affect young men and women from all walks of life, but poor and unmarried people are more susceptible to sexual victimization than are married people and those from the middle and upper classes.

There are some interesting differences by the sex of the victim with regards to the characteristics of the rape situation itself. Table II displays these

³The NCVS collects data on personal and household victimization through an ongoing national survey of citizens. Prior to June of 1984, the survey was based upon a sample of around 72,000 housing units, and interviews were conducted at six month intervals with each household member, with about 10,000 interviews conducted each month. After June of 1984, the sample was cut to 59,000 households with 9,000 monthly interviews. A two-stage sampling procedure is used to sample housing units within a Primary Sampling Unit (PSU). First, Enumeration Districts (ED) are systematically selected with a probability proportionate to population size (according to the Census year) from a geographically arranged listing. Then, each previously selected ED is subdivided into segments of four housing units from which a sample of segments is selected. The sample of housing units is divided into six rotation groups with each group being interviewed every six months for a period of 3.5 years in order to avoid interviewing the same household indefinitely. All persons age 12 and over are interviewed, usually in person or by telephone, but proxy interviewees can be used if the original person is unable to interview. Each respondent is asked questions to determine if he or she was victimized during the six month period before the first day of the month the interview is conducted.

differences as well as the similarities. Male and female victims are much more likely to be raped in urban areas (93%), more likely to be raped by white assailants (66%), more likely to be raped by assailants 18 years of age and older (92%), and are equally likely to suffer injuries (80%) and require medical attention (50%). However, men are more likely than women to be raped during the day, by multiple assailants, when a weapon is present, in a public area, and by a stranger. Men are less likely to be raped at home, to claim that a rape was completed, and less likely to protect themselves during the event.

The NCVS, contrary to common belief, does not ask the same questions in exactly the same way each year. The survey has undergone revisions that make data comparisons from year to year—depending on the crime category—risky. For example, the 1979-1987 data set used here is based on a revised questionnaire that asks some questions in a different way than in other versions. We limited our attention to that part of the survey on which comparable information was available on both male and female rape victims. The relatively small number of male victims limited our analysis, but we were willing to make certain compromises in order to learn more about this important topic. Kindermann et al. (1997) note that the NCVS was revised in 1992 to produce higher reporting rates. However, if one examines the 1992-1995 incident level rape subset the data yields too small a number of males to perform meaningful quantitative analysis. The proportion of males to females is higher in the 1979-1987 data set, and is therefore more useful. We must emphasize that we are more concerned with reasons for reporting or not reporting rape than with estimating accurate rape rates.

Table I. Descriptive Statistics on the Characteristics of Victims, by Sex

Variable	Percent Male (<i>n</i> = 81)	Percent Female (<i>n</i> = 809)
Employed during rape		
Yes	60.3	51.4
No	39.7	48.6
Marital status		
Married	24.7	15.5
Not married	75.3	84.5
Race of victim		
White	77.8	74.8
Minority	22.2	25.2
Continuous Variables	Average Male	Average Female
Median age	23	23
Avg. highest grade attended (years)	15.38	14.827
Median family income	15,000–17,449	10,000–12,000

Table II. Descriptive Statistics on Characteristics of the Rape Situation, by Sex

Variable	Percent Male	Percent Female
Incident in city limits		
No	6.5	6.4
Yes (same city)	59.7	68.7
Yes (diff. city)	33.8	24.8
Time of occurrence		
6 am–6 pm	44.4	33.7
6 pm–6 am	55.6	66.3
Place of occurrence		
Own place	8.9	33.7
Near place	3.8	08.0
Neighbor place	17.7	14.7
Public place	69.6	43.6
Number of offenders		
Single	73.4	86.1
Multiple	26.6	13.9
Age of single offender		
17 and under	8.8	7.3
18–29	56.1	56.1
30+	35.1	36.6
Offender known		
Yes	45.6	54.9
No	54.4	45.1
Race of offender		
White	69.0	63.5
Non-white	31.0	36.5
Offender had weapon		
No	64.4	76.2
Yes	35.6	23.8
Protected self		
Yes	69.1	83.9
No	30.9	16.1
Injuries suffered		
No	18.2	20.3
Yes	81.8	79.7
Med. care required		
Yes	48.1	49.8
No	51.9	50.2
Type of crime		
Rape	22.2	34.6
Atmpt. rape	77.8	65.4

Variables

The dependent variable is *Unreported* (whether or not the crime was reported to the police). In order to predict rape reporting by sex, male and female rape victims were compared on both selected independent variables

and on situational characteristics of the rape itself. We anticipated that males would report less than females, and that the correlates of reporting would differ by sex because of different rape circumstances and the influence of sex-role socialization in defining rape. In order to assess differences in reporting, we examined preliminarily a number of possible correlates of reporting behavior, but limited our final model to those factors that appeared to make sense theoretically in light of the argument made earlier. The independent variables believed to influence a person's reporting decision are described below.

Interval level independent variables of interest include *victim educational attainment* and *victim family income*. Dichotomized independent variables include *unrelated* (which refers to whether or not a known offender is related to the victim) *victim sex*, *no weapon* (which refers to whether or not the assailant had a weapon on his or her person during the incident), *not stolen* (which refers to whether or not the assailant(s) stole property belonging to the victim during the criminal event), *no injuries* (which refers to whether or not the victim suffered any injuries), and *no medical* (which refers to whether or not the victim needed medical attention as a result of victimization).

The measurement of the variables dictated that a logistic regression was the analysis of choice. Preliminary analyses showed that some variables we thought might be relevant predictors were unrelated to whether the victim, whether male or female, reported the crime to the police. These included whether the crime was completed or attempted, how well the offender knew the assailant, if at all (although this variable was correlated with our measure of whether the victim was related to the offender), whether there were multiple offenders, and whether or not the victim was employed at the time of the incident. We were also aware that with a relatively small number of male rape victims, additional variables in the model ran the statistical risk of increasing the possibility of zero cells, making the coefficient estimates unstable.

Table III. Sex and Rape Reporting to the Police

		Report		Total
		Yes	No	
Sex	Female	443 (54%)	373 (46%)	816
	Male	34 (42%)	47 (58%)	81
Total		477 (53%)	420 (47%)	897

Pearson chi-square = 4.487 with 1 d.f., $p < .05$

Odds ratio = $\frac{34/47}{443/373} = .609$

RESULTS

While a multivariate analysis permits an examination of sex on rape reporting net of other control variables, it might be important to first show the relationship in a simple table. Table III shows a simple cross-tabulation of sex and rape reporting. Clearly, sex and rape reporting are not independent. The odds ratio shows that females are more than one-and-a-half times more likely than males to report rape to the police, and this finding is statistically significant at the .05 level. We see that 54 percent of the females, but only 42 percent of the males reported their rape victimizations to the police. This is consistent with our expectations that males are more likely than females to underreport this crime.

Table IV contains the estimates of the full model (males and females are both included) obtained from a logistic regression analysis. All of the beta coefficients are significant at the .05 level. Turning our attention first to sex, we again see that females are more likely than males to report rape to the police. The odds that a male will report rape to the police is only 60 percent of that of females ($e^{(-.520)} = .595$), controlling for the other variables in the model.

As we also expected, reporting is strongly related to the perceived

Table IV. Logistic Regression Coefficients for Rape Reporting, Full Model

Variable ^a	B	S.E.	Odds Ratio
Sex	-.520 ^b	.259	.595
Unrelated	.523 ^b	.202	1.69
Not stolen	1.52 ^b	.272	4.58
No weapon	-.499 ^b	.191	.608
Income	-.040 ^b	.018	.961
Educ	.097 ^b	.026	1.01
No injuries	.649 ^b	.171	1.91
No medical	1.15 ^b	.207	3.15
Chi-square	155.12 ^b		
d.f.	8		
N	897		

^aVariables: unreported—Was rape reported to the police? Coded 0 for reported, 1 for not reported; Unrelated—Was offender related to victim? Coded 0 for related, 1 for not related; Not stolen—Was something stolen during the rape? Coded 0 for yes, 1 for no; No weapon—Was a weapon used during the rape? Coded 0 for yes, 1 for no; Income—Interval level measurement, measured in dollars; Education—Interval level measurement, measured in grade completed; No injuries—Were injuries sustained by the victim? Coded 0 for yes, 1 for no; No medical—Was medical attention required by the victim? Coded 0 for yes, 1 for no.

^bCoefficient significant at the .05 level.

seriousness of the offense. Acts of rape are almost twice as likely to be reported if the perpetrator is a stranger ($e^{(.523)} = 1.69$) and nearly five times as likely to be reported if something was stolen during the rape ($e^{(1.52)} = 4.58$). The consequences of rape are also related to its reporting because these help define the seriousness of the crime. The odds of reporting increased if any injuries were sustained or if medical attention was required by the victim. Similarly, the presence of a weapon increases rape reporting. We also note that the victim's income ($e^{(-.040)} = .961$) and education ($e^{(.097)} = 1.01$) were related to rape reporting, but the effects are small and their meaning mixed. Education is positively and income negatively related to rape reporting. The coefficients may have achieved statistical significance because of the relatively high sample size of females ($N = 816$). In any case, whatever effects may exist of social background on rape reporting may reflect greater confidence in the police, or the criminal justice system, which is related generally to crime reporting. Persons of higher education, even if their incomes are not high, may be more linked to the status quo, and its institutions, including those whose charge it is to protect the status quo: the police. We also tested for interactions between sex and the other individual predictor variables. The product terms of these interactions were not statistically significant (results available on request). This suggests that the slopes of the betas are not different for males and females.

In addition to sex differences in reporting, we hypothesized that there would be differences in the reporting of this crime to the police, but that those rapes which were reported would be accounted for by the same factors, especially as those factors pertained to crime seriousness. To address this issue, we computed the full model for males and females separately. Table V shows the estimates for two full models (one for males and one for females). The factors that influence reporting for females are not those that influence reporting for males.

Rape is reported to the police when it is perceived as serious by the victim. But males and females differ on what influences their perceptions of seriousness. For females, all of the variables in the full model influenced reporting, including those factors that pertained to bodily injury, whether the offender was a stranger to the victim, whether a weapon was present and whether something was stolen. In addition, as with the full model in Table I, income and education levels were associated with increased reporting for female victims, but only modestly so. More significantly, for females rape was nearly twice as likely to be reported ($e^{(.533)} = 1.70$) if the offender was a stranger, more than four times as likely to be reported if something was stolen ($e^{(1.51)} = 4.54$), and three times as likely to be reported if the victim required medical attention ($e^{(1.11)} = 3.03$).

Male victims, on the other hand, were influenced only by the extent

to which the rape caused physical bodily harm. Injuries increased the odds of reporting the crime to the police by more than five times ($e^{(1.72)} = 5.60$), while the necessity to seek medical attention increased the odds by over eight times ($e^{(2.13)} = 8.44$). None of the other predictor variables achieved statistical significance although many of the coefficients were in the predicted direction.

This suggests to us that men are more likely to report rape when they can demonstrate they could not have protected themselves. When an assailant severely injures a male, especially if that injury requires medical attention, the victim has justification to report the crime because the evidence can show the victim was overpowered. Under these circumstances, the victim may think that the police and others are unlikely to question the victim's sexual orientation or courage. Whereas a woman will report when the act more closely fits the classic rape situation (see Williams, 1984) (reinforcing hetero-normative femininity), it could be that a man will report when it will not jeopardize his conception of self and manhood. We would caution, however, that the N for males is probably too small for the results to be statistically powerful, so the gendered differences reported here should be interpreted as preliminary.

Table V. Logistic Regression Coefficients for Rape Reporting, Full Model by Sex

Variable ^a	Males			Females		
	B	S.E.	Odds Ratio	B	S.E.	Odds Ratio
Unrelated	1.03	1.14	2.81	.533 ^b	.206	1.70
Not stolen	2.19	1.30	8.90	1.51 ^b	.280	4.54
No weapon	-1.00	.551	.365	-.415 ^b	.204	.660
Income	-.032	.070	.969	-.402 ^b	.019	.959
Educ	.055	.089	1.06	.098 ^b	.028	1.10
No injuries	1.72 ^b	.771	5.60	.587 ^b	.177	1.80
No medical	2.13 ^b	1.03	8.44	1.11 ^b	.212	3.03
Chi-square	22.06			133.28 ^b		
d.f.	7			7		
N	81			816		

^aVariables: unreported—Was rape reported to the police? Coded 0 for reported, 1 for not reported; Unrelated—Was offender related to victim? Coded 0 for related, 1 for not related; Not stolen—Was something stolen during the rape? Coded 0 for yes, 1 for no; No weapon—Was a weapon used during the rape? Coded 0 for yes, 1 for no; Income—Interval level measurement, measured in dollars; Education—Interval level measurement, measured in grade completed; No injuries—Were injuries sustained by the victim? Coded 0 for yes, 1 for no; No medical—Was medical attention required by the victim? Coded 0 for yes, 1 for no.

^bCoefficient significant at the .05 level.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study used the National Sample Rape Subset for the years 1979–1987 of the National Crime Victimization Survey to examine and compare male and female rape and rape reporting behavior. The odds of men reporting rape are less than those for women, but both men and women are more likely to report victimization when there was physical evidence of the crime to corroborate their claims. Women, but not men, were affected by such considerations as whether the assailant is a relative, whether a weapon was present, education and income background, and whether or not something was stolen during the rape.

The gendered social context of rape differs by the sex of the victim, demonstrating that context is important in understanding rape and rape reporting behavior. To document and begin to explain the asymmetrical effects of gender as context on the experience and measuring of rape and rape reporting are important and interesting tasks that could contribute a great deal to social scientific understandings of rape, reporting, and gender. Future research within this theoretical context is needed.

Even though these findings present us with an interesting overview on some of the aspects of male and female rape reporting behavior, they should be taken as preliminary. While the data set used for this study is the best available for comparing male and female rape, qualitative methodologies may be the most appropriate way to examine this socially complex topic. With qualitative methods, one can better explain why (rather than just how) rape and rape reporting differs for men and women, and better understand the gendered experience of rape in general.

Even though rape is similar to other violent crimes in many respects, it must be treated differently because of the unique impact sex role socialization and norms have on rape for both men and women. To neglect the study of male rape and rape reporting behavior is to uphold the stereotype that men cannot be rape victims. It would be equally absurd to neglect the study of female murder victims or male prostitutes. If rape research continues to ignore male rape victims, rape will not be completely understood for either gender.

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